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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine if reading with a buddy and participating in a literature discussion would have an effect on reading comprehension achievement. For six weeks, seven pairs of third grade students met three times a week to read assigned material and participate in small group literature discussions to construct meaning and important events together before completing the accompanying comprehension activities individually. The remaining students read the assignments and completed comprehension activities independently. The story activities and quizzes were graded and student scores were compared. The results tend to support the hypothesis but the difference between the means of the samples was not significant. A reading survey to assess attitudes towards the benefits of reading with a partner was developed by the researcher was administered to all the students before and after the project period. Data from the posttest reading survey and journal writings showed an improvement on attitude towards reading as well as reading with a partner and participating in a literature discussion. (Contains 47 references and a table of data. Appendixes contain the reading survey and data.) (Author/RS)

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The Effect Of Reading With A Partner And Participating In A Literature Discussion On Reading Comprehension

By Nancy L. Bower

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In partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of
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Kean University of New Jersey

N. L. Bower

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine if reading with a buddy and participating in a literature discussion would have an effect on reading comprehension achievement. For six weeks, seven pairs of third grade students met three times a week to read assigned material and participated in small group literature discussions to construct meaning and important events together before completing the accompanying comprehension activities individually. The remaining students read the assignments and completed comprehension activities independently. The story activities and quizzes were graded and student scores were compared. The results tend to support the hypothesis but the difference between the means of the samples was not significant.

A reading survey to assess attitudes towards the benefits of reading with a partner was developed by the researcher was administered to all the students before and after the project period.

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I. Mean, Standard Deviations and T of the Samples' Total Comprehension Achievement 4

Peer and cross-age tutoring are as natural as sibling relationships and occur whenever a more accomplished student aids a lower achieving classmate, or when an older student instructs a younger one. Pupil to pupil teaching is probably as old as instruction. In many classrooms from the past centuries, peer tutoring was a standard practice. The one room schoolhouse made it difficult for a teacher to meet the needs of so many diverse ages and abilities. Webb and Schwartz (1988) conclude in their research that educators today understand the value of small group and one on one instruction by peers.

Rosenblatt (1978) argued that there can be no absolute, single correct way of responding to literature; the meaning is neither lying in the text awaiting discovery, nor is it solely in the experiences readers bring to reading. Readers should be allowed and encouraged to live through the experience and to construct their own unique meanings as they read. Rosenblatt also kept a delicate balance between the individual reader and the group. Individual meanings can be challenged and negotiated as readers get together to share their responses as well as their interpretations.

One of the most common ways to discover others' thinking about literature is through discussion, and in elementary classrooms, students and teachers often are found talking about texts they have read. Hynds (1990) urges teachers "to create classrooms where students are creating unique interpretations, not guessing at predetermined answers" by providing opportunities for discussions in which

participants accept the differing points of view. Vygotsky's (1978) ideas about the social construction of knowledge inform educators about the potential value of talk in literature programs for developing literary understanding and appreciation. Collaborative interaction helps learners to stretch beyond their limits and gain new insights.

Hypothesis

In order to provide further evidence on the topic, the following study was established. It was hypothesized that reading with a buddy and participating in dialogue about story elements and story events would improve reading comprehension when compared to those students that did not participate in a discussion with peers and read by themselves.

Procedures

Twenty four third grade students from one classroom, fourteen boys and ten girls, participated in this study. A total of fourteen students with varying reading abilities were randomly selected for reading pairs.

Before the study began, the classroom teacher modeled how to read an assigned story selection with a partner and questioning strategies to use in order to check one another for story comprehension. All twenty four students had several opportunities to experience buddy reading pairs prior to the study. All students were then encouraged to discuss and summarize the day's reading after the assigned story selection had been read.

A reading survey developed by the researcher was administered to all the students. The survey consisted of questions regarding the students attitudes toward reading, the importance of reading as it relates to the world around them, their interest in reading with a peer and their feelings about participating in a literature discussion group.

Seven reading pairs met three times a week to complete the assigned reading selections, for six weeks. Each reading session lasted approximately forty five minutes. Throughout the study, each of the fourteen reading paired participants had the opportunity to meet with a different reading paired student during the reading sessions. All twenty four third grade students read simultaneously in one classroom during each reading session.

Students participating in small group literature discussions constructed meaning and discussed important events together before completing the accompanying comprehension workbook pages or comprehension activities individually. During the reading sessions, the classroom teacher circulated the room to monitor reading participation and provided feedback concerning discussion strategies. The non paired readers completed the accompanying comprehension workbook pages or comprehension activities after their independent reading had been completed.

All story activities and quizzes were graded and student scores were compared. Students were given a post-test reading survey at the end of the study

to assess attitudes towards the benefits of reading with a partner.

Results

As can be seen in Table I, there was a minor difference between the means of the samples' achievement at the conclusion of the study.

Table I

Mean, Standard Deviations and t of the Samples' Total Comprehension Achievement

Sample	Mean	Standard Deviation	t
Experimental	143.12	16.69	1.73
Control	131.75	14.59	

This difference was statistically not significant. There was a 11.37 point difference between the mean of the paired samples.

Results from story activities and quizzes from the students who participated in literature discussion pairs were higher than those who completed assignments independently. Story comprehension skill analysis included questions based on the main idea, story details, cause and effect, inference, vocabulary and proper sequencing of story events.

The data from the post-test reading survey and journal writings show an improvement on attitude towards reading as well as reading with a partner and participating in a literature discussion. Throughout the study, the non-paired reading students continually expressed a desire to participate in reading pairs for

formal reading lessons and/or reading discussions. During D.E.A.R. (Drop Everything And Read) time, most of the twenty four students gravitated toward a buddy rather than reading by themselves. In the days following the study, the paired readers continued to select a buddy during reading class without having to be encouraged by their teacher.

Conclusions and Implications

The hypothesis that reading with a buddy and participating in dialogue about story elements and story events improves reading comprehension was supported by the student scores on tests and quizzes, although there was not enough of a difference to show a statistical difference for this particular study. Students who previously struggled with reading comprehension seemed to benefit from working with a partner as evidenced by their increased test scores. Two special education students who receive pull out replacement reading instruction and are reading a year below grade level requested to read regular classroom reading assignments with a buddy. These two students were paired with regular education reading partners and successfully completed comprehension quizzes with higher scores than some students who had not participated in a literature discussions.

Other third graders that participated in reading pairs seemed to exhibit more enthusiasm and effort when dealing with literature. They appeared to be more confident and supportive of others while completing reading assignments. Some students who struggle with decoding and reading comprehension also raised their

test scores when they read with a buddy and participated in a literature discussion. At the conclusion of the study, non-reading paired students again requested to participate in a reading pair and literature discussion. Now, all twenty four students have the option of completing reading assignments individually or with a reading buddy. The majority of students opt to read with a partner.

Reading with a partner and participating in a literature discussion is an important component in an effective reading program. Shared thoughts stimulate further ideas from other in a literature discussion group and result in the collaborative construction of meaning for all involved (Casden, 1988). As a result of this study's positive feedback from students and increased reading test scores, reading partners and literature discussions should have a permanent place in any reading program.

Reading And Discussing Literature:

Related Literature

The power of students' abilities to construct their own meaning as they read has been the focal point of primary classrooms in the last several years. The last few years have brought a renewed emphasis on meaning-centered approaches. These methods reflect an acknowledgement of the importance of student response and aim to provide students with authentic opportunities to verbalize their thoughts and feelings about what they read (Jewel & Pratt, 1999).

Small group literature discussions are small groups of students who read the same book together or independently and then meet to discuss their understandings with one another (Short, 1997). After reading the story/ book, participants usually respond in personal journals or literature logs to what they have read. These journal responses often form the basis for the small group discussions. During the discussion, the participants explore issues of common interest, clarify points from the reading, raising new questions, and related what they have read to their own lives. As students engage in these activities, they begin to view themselves as members of the literacy community.

Short (1997) suggested the goal of literature circles is to allow students to listen carefully and think deeply with other members to create understandings that go beyond those individual members. Peterson and Eeds (1990) called this literature dialogue, which encompasses inquiry and critique, "grand conversations" and argued that real books have the potential to produce grand conversations.

Louise Rosenblatt's reader response theory has inspired educators to look

closely at the relationship between reader and text. "Reading is a transactional, two way process involving a reader and a text at a particular time under particular circumstances " (Rosenblatt, 1978). According to the reader response theory, readers actively construct meaning by responding to a text and then reflecting on their responses. Readers tend to read literature as an experience by exploring possibilities and focusing on relationships between human conditions, emotions, and events (Langer, 1990; Rosenblatt, 1995). Therefore, it is crucial that all students, including struggling readers, have the opportunities to respond anesthetically to foster appreciation as well as a lifelong desire to read (Rosenblatt, 1982).

Carmen M. Martinez-Roldan and Julia M. Lopez-Robertson were inspired by Rosenblatt's reader response theory and completed a study about literature discussions with bilingual education students. This study took place in a first grade bilingual classroom where children were assigned books to read and then placed in one of three literature circles; a Spanish speaking group, and two English speaking groups. The teachers selected the culturally sensitive books to be read aloud to the students. The purpose of the literature circles was not to teach students how to read the book, but to facilitate meaningful discussions about each book. Students were encouraged to listen to one another, share their feelings, and respond to or ask questions of the other members of the group. Through the literature discussion, the teachers were able to learn more about the cultural tension that affect the daily lives of the children (Klassen, 1993). Students had the opportunity to respond

intimately and spontaneously to the literature. The study concluded that learning is a process of searching for and making connections (Short, 1993). Integrating literature discussions into the curriculum was fruitful and these bilingual students learned from written language and learned to use new language skills .

Despite the quality literature experiences some children bring to school, the students sill need to be prepared to respond to and discuss literature in meaningful ways. Teachers spend several weeks at the beginning of the school year talking with children about the kind of thinking they do before reading, while they're reading, and after reading a story. Teachers and students work together to read, write, and talk about books. Teacher modeling of responses can demonstrate for children that readers make personal meaning. Through teacher modeling, students learn how to make sense of literature and how to become actively engaged in meaning making (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988). Squire (1989) concluded that "the task of the teacher of literature... is to focus on the transaction between the book and the reader, on the literacy experience itself, and on ways of extending and deepening it."

Terry A. Jewell and Donna Pratt also developed a study based upon the philosophy of Rosenblatt's reader response theory. Jewel and Pratt were concerned that without direct questioning, their second and third grade students would not probe deeply enough when they read. They structured their literature circles in order to preserve student ownership of the discussions and ensured that the discussions were interactive and reflective. Students in this study spoke

meaningfully with each other about literature. Their responses communicated their understanding of the text and the importance of sharing their ideas. The teachers modeled how to pose questions that lead to good discussions, found supporting evidence, connected with others' ideas, and elaborated upon one's own ideas. The teachers' role in the discussions was an important component. The help given to students involved teacher behavior that guaranteed the success of the literature discussion groups. The teachers modeled strategies necessary for successful discussions. The completion of this study discovered that the students' exploration of text and the connections they make with one another's points of view will keep alive thinkers and learners in primary classrooms.

Joann Dugan's study entitled Transactional Literature Discussion: Engaging students in the appreciation and understanding of literature provided opportunities for integrated reading, writing, and talk sessions encouraged students to respond openly to literature and become actively involved in the meaning-making process. During the study, the voices of the children echoed a powerful message; shared reading and writing, talking about a story, putting on a play were not only fun but helped them understand the story. Difficulties are compounded when instruction emphasizes skills at the expense of meaningful reading and writing when poor readers who can read words but have trouble comprehending, (Allington, Steutzel, Shake, & Lamarche, 1986). Instead they focus on words and surface features (Langer, 1990) and fail to construct meaningful, whole understandings (Purcel-Gates,

1991). This article focused on an instructional approach to helping students and teachers read, talk about, and appreciate full length trade books. The Transactional Literature Discussions (TLD) grew out of the author's teaching experience with at risk readers and how to best involve them in meaningful reading and writing. Dugan concluded that TLD suggests that reading and writing are reciprocal processes (Clay, 1982; Shanahan, 1984). TLD also provided opportunities for students to write in response to their reading and discussions of literature. The students grew from passive, timid readers to active readers who confidently expressed their thoughts and assumed responsibility for reading, talking, and writing about literature. The students learned to justify their responses, question the text and one another, acknowledged, and respected others' contributions.

Recent research has reported that peers are a powerful influence on children's talk (Cazden, 1988; Eeds & Wells, 1989; Golden, 1986). Vygotsky believed that literacy develops best through social interactions and dialogue with others (Vygotsky, 1986). Vygotsky (1978) also argued that "problem solving in collaboration with more capable peers" enables children to expand their understanding and learning. This occurs within a "zone of proximal development" (Vygotsky, 1978). This zone exists where a child interacts with a more experienced mentor or adult who leads the child through scaffolded information to a level of increased understanding. Beneficial effects may also occur when a more informed child motivates his or her peers to consider other perspectives and rethink prior

knowledge, leading to new interpretations.

Julie Wollman-Bonilla and Barbara Werchadlo completed a study (1999) building on Vygotsky's ideas that an adult's role is to provide guidance and feedback, supporting the child's successful participation in the activity. The study concluded that with teacher scaffolding (modeling, explicit instruction, feedback, and the creation of contexts for sharing), the students responded thoughtfully and personally to the books read. Teacher and peer scaffolding created a "zone of proximal development" wherein students could go beyond what they were capable of alone.

Leal's study also (1993) supports Vygotsky's theory by studying the benefits of peer-group discussions. She found three benefits of peer group discussions. The first was to allow students rather than teachers to serve as catalysts for discussion topics. This elicited personal responses and authentic purposes for learning. When one child expresses his or her personal prior knowledge, the prior knowledge of other participants is activated. These shared thoughts stimulate further ideas from others in the group and result in the collaborative construction of meaning for all involved (Casden, 1988; Peterson & Eeds, 1990). A second benefit of literary peer group discussions was the giving students the opportunity for assuming complementary problem-solving roles (Cazden, 1988; Palincsar & Brown, 1984; Vygotsky, 1962). In the middle of group discussion, one students can find meaning for a problem from another student. Where one student lacks sufficient

understanding, another may serve as the tutor. Vygotsky (1962) pointed out what a child can do with a partner today, he can do by himself tomorrow. The third benefit of peer group discussion is for the teachers. These literature discussions provide a means for transferring some of the responsibility for learning from the teacher to the students (Alvermann, Dillon, & O'Brien, 1987). Peer literature discussions provide a unique opportunity for students to claim ownership of the learning process and to talk about personally significant areas for clarification and collaboration.

One of the most common ways to discover others' thinking about literature is through discussion. By talking to one another about the literature, participants verify their personal meanings and listen to others' interpretations. Children bring a wealth of knowledge and experience to the classroom that helps them to understand books and new ideas. Eeds and Peterson (1994) advocated a model of "grand conversations" in literature discussions for children. Literature discussions and literature circles give students and teachers the opportunity to use all aspects of language, (reading, writing, speaking, and listening) in natural ways.

Gilles, Dickinson, Mc Bride, and Vandover's study concerned using those "grand conversations" about literature into the classroom. The article described literature discussion groups and role of talk in them. Students interact with one another by using exploratory talk to discuss ideas and relationships in books. Together the groups created new meanings and meanings that no one could have created alone. In these literature discussions, the teacher's role moved between

that of facilitator and guide (Freedman, 1993). At times the teacher was a facilitating participant, a group member who helps all students contribute. However, at other times the group needed more than a teacher participant. The study concluded that there is not a single "right answer" to the question of how to encourage thoughtful group talk or how to bring timid children into the groups.

Meryl Blau Menon and John Mirabito's studied the effects of fourth and sixth graders getting together to read and talk about books. The purpose of their study was for the children to develop habits and pleasures associated with reading. The authors believed that encouraging a reading lifestyle and learning to articulate reactions to reading are important goals. Their students learned to listen, respond, and learned to enjoy reading during Hooked On Books (HOB) time. HOB time was when the fourth and sixth graders met to talk about books. During the course of the study, the students read, talked, shared, laughed, and improved their ability to listen carefully as well as their understanding of the meaning and content of the books. The fourth and sixth graders also found they appreciated many of the same novels. Menon and Mirabito believed that through the HOB program, students developed an important life skill and a common love of a good book.

Response to literature is personal; therefore, literature has multiple interpretations. There is not just one acceptable response to a piece of writing but a range of acceptable responses. This means that no one can give the "correct" understanding of a piece of literature to another person (Farnan & Kelly, 1993).

Peer sharing is also important because children can compare their ideas to classmates' interpretations and see new perspectives (Harste, Woodward, & Burke, 1994).

When students encounter books they enjoy, they are eager to respond to them. The classroom teacher should provide opportunities for a variety of responses and let children themselves decide what is appropriate so that they feel a sense of ownership. Teachers should realize that interpretations of literature may vary from student to student; and they should "be prepared to expect, respect, and accept a wide variety of student response" (Sweet, 1993).

Dyson (1989) and Rowe's (1989) studies of children while they were writing documented the power of peers to enable literacy growth. Eeds and Wells (1989) also revealed the complexities of verbal exchanged in literature circles. Rhodes and Shanklin (1993) asserted that partner reading "helps to bridge the gap between relying on the teacher too much and reading more independently" (p. 194).

Laurie MacGillivray and Shirl Hawes' study was influenced by previously mentioned research on children's peer interactions. In this study, children negotiated partner reading. The roles they assumed determined who was in charge and how the reading would be carried out. The four types of roles explained were coworkers, fellow artists, teacher/ student, and boss/ employee. The roles the children assumed in partner reading offered glimpses into children's views of themselves as readers and their views of reading processes. Within one partner

reading event, students often moved between these role sets. Three issues seemed integral to the interactions; first, children had a sense of their own competence. Second, the students' concerns about the desire to behave appropriately by school expectations, control the situation, or enjoying the interaction, impacted reading events. Third, students' competence and concerns guided the interactions. MacGillivray and Hawes concluded that if children are going to spend time reading or writing together, it is important to talk about appropriate ways to interact and perhaps establish guidelines to support positive partner reading interactions. It is also beneficial to have students role play how they might help a partner with a word or what to say when their feelings get hurt. It would be helpful to discuss how both verbal and nonverbal communications can be misunderstood. Finally, MacGillivray and Hawes' study agreed with Rosenblatt's (1978) philosophy that states that it is natural and important for children to interact in various ways with print as lifelong readers do.

Literature response groups are the perfect vehicle for social interaction because they allow intensive interactions over books. Ash (1990) says that "social interaction brings literature to life." Literature response groups give opportunities for dialogue, a forum in which to raise questions, argue and reflect, and negotiate meaning (Noll, 1994).

It is important to take the time to listen and reflect upon the richness of children's interactions. In classroom that value listening and speaking as well as

reading and writing, peer interactions can offer a wealth of information that can inform willing teachers.

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Appendices

Name_____ 26

Reading Survey

Answer the following questions.

1. Do you enjoy reading books by yourself. Why?

_____

2. Do you enjoy reading books with a partner. Explain.

_____

_____

_____

3. Do you like having stories read to you? Explain.

_____

_____

_____

4. If I had a choice, I'd rather read with by myself or with a partner.

Explain your answer. _____

_____

_____

5. _____ is my favorite author.

6. My favorite kinds of stories are _____.

7. When I read by myself, I understand everything I read. Answer **yes** or **no**

and explain. _____

_____

Data of Reading Comprehension Activites

Total # of questions->	20	7	9	5	9	17	8	10	9	11	10	11	14	12	15	totals
Reading Pairs																
Eric	20	6	8	3	8	17	8	9	7	10	8	8	12	10	13	147
Mohamadia	20	7	8.5	5	8.5	17	8	9	8	10.5	9	10.5	14	12	15	162
Joshua R.	18	6	7	3	7	15	7	8	7	9	8	10	12	10	14	141
Bernardo	16	5	6.5	4	7	11	6	5	6	5	8	8	10	9	12	118.5
Bobby	11	6.5	7.5	1	7.5	13.5	4	6	8	7	8	7	8	8	8	111
Alexa	18	5.5	8.5	4	8.5	14.5	8	10	9	11	9	10	14	11	14	156
Diane	18	7	8.5	4	8.5	17	6	10	8	10	8	11	10	11	15	152
Sean	15	7	7	4	7	12	7	10	9	10	9	9	14	11	14	145
Santiago	16	6	7.5	3	7.5	15	6	9	6	7.5	9	8.5	12	11	12	136
Michael F.	14	5.5	6	3	4	10	7	9	4	7	8	6.5	10	11	12	117
Michael Mo	20	6.5	6	3	8	17	8	8	8	10.5	9	9.5	14	12	14	153.5
Sohmmy	20	7	8	4	9	16.5	8	10	9	11	9	11	14	12	14	162.5
Kayli	19	6	8	5	8	16.5	8	9	8	10.5	9	10	12	12	12	153
Rebecca	20	5.5	8	4	7	16	7	10	8	9.5	10	9	12	12	12	150
Non-paired																
Anna	19	6.5	7.5	3	8	17	7	10	8	9	9	8.5	11	11	15	149.5
Alex	13	6	8	2	6	9	5	5	7	9	6	10	8	10	8	112
Mikko	19	5.5	7	4	6	15	5	10	6	7	8	7	12	7	12	130
Julie Anne	14	7.5	6.5	3	4	11.5	8	8	5	7	7	7.5	7	11	7	114
Hassan	20	5	9	4	7	13.5	8	9	7	8	9	6	14	10	14	143.5
Andrew	18	4	8	4	5	15.5	7	8	7	7	7	9.5	10	10	10	130
Sebastian	17	3	7.5	1	5	13.5	5	9	5.5	8	5	7	14	9	13	142.5
Joshua C.	18	6	8.5	2	3	11.5	7	7	3	8	7	8.5	10	9	11	152
Leanne	15	5	5	3	6	10	4	7	6	6	6	6	14	11	10	114
Madeline	18	3	7	3	6	16.5	8	9	5.5	6.5	7	7.5	12	9	12	130